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***Transforming European Employment Policy;
Labour Market Transition and the
Promotion of Capability by Ralf
Rogowski, Robert Salais
and Noel Whiteside.
A Review***

Sonja Bekker *

Transforming European Employment Policy sets an ambitious goal: to generate ideas for an alternative European reform agenda by calling for a revision of the content and the functioning of European employment policy. As a result, it provides a critical assessment of both EU-level policies and practices at national and company level. The proposals put forward are largely built on two theoretical approaches, the transitional labour market approach (TLM) and the capabilities approach.

In essence, the book deals with a very pressing and complex question: How to transform European labour markets in such a way that both the EU, its Member States and its citizens maintain a proper level of security while being – or taking part – in a competitive and globalised economy. This question is relevant not only in light of the recent economic crisis, but also considering the long-standing trends towards more labour market flexibility, the growing emphasis placed on economic demand and the

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The present review refers to Ralf Rogowski, Robert Salais and Noel Whiteside eds. *Transforming European Employment Policy: Labour Market Transitions and the Promotion of Capability*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2011. 288 pp. ISBN 978 1 84980 2567.

declining financial means to sustain post-war welfare states. The main question of the work is as challenging as its attempt to provide an answer within the scope of just one book.

By producing an edited volume, an effort is made to consider the several facets of the employment policies. The chapters collect theoretical as well as empirical contributions by authors from different academic backgrounds. The book is broken down into two sections that follow some introductory remarks. Section I describes and compares the TLM and the capability approaches. Section II emphasizes the implications for European policies, by outlining the 'integrated approach to employment' which – according to the Authors – thoroughly reviews the bases of current approaches.

Apart from clarifying the overall aim of the book and its different sections, Chapter I also presents a critical assessment of the role of the EU in dealing with the social policy agenda, painting some rather bleak prospects for social Europe. For instance, it is argued that "[...] social Europe is incomplete and threatened with disintegration under the advancing encroachment of market principles" (p.10). The Authors provide some trenchant critiques on the increasing use of quantitative indicators to coordinate employment policies. Moreover, they find that EU policies tend to transfer the burden of adjustment upon the individual by advocating employability and activation.

The rather critical and pessimistic nature of the introduction could have set the tone for the subsequent contributions. Yet, the collection of chapters reveals a more nuanced view of the state and future of social Europe. The chapters providing an empirical analysis show that there is a gap between the ideal state of social Europe and reality. However, they also demonstrate that a number of initiatives need to be implemented which might serve as a starting point for the building up of social Europe. By way of example, Wotschack points out that whereas the distribution and utilisation of working-life time accounts are inadequate and that too much initiative is left upon the employer, the mere existence of such schemes offers a basis for developing better functioning systems. By the same token, Deakin, Rogowski and Salais highlight the shortcomings of EU-level policies and legislation, while concurrently signalling that the Treaty provides important pieces of labour law and that EU employment policy is not only about enhancing flexibility.

The authors put forward the TLM approach and the capabilities approach as major components for improving employment policies. This choice is a fruitful one. The contributions successfully argue in favour of leaving the flexibility pathway behind and place more attention on securing individual

transitions to and within the labour market. The TLM approach reveals that the current labour market is different from that of ten years ago. Original solutions have to be explored to meet the new needs of people in this ever-changing labour market. In this connection, Schmid gives a list of alternatives such as setting up institutional arrangements that enhance transitions within labour markets. Such institutions would include new social rights that go beyond employment – for example the right to training or care leave and income protection – considering and seek for governance methods that would relate labour market actors to social policy. Further, with regard to the TLM approach, Kaps and Schütz question the effectiveness of privatization of placement services to support activation measures and argue for a more optimal public-private integration. As for the capabilities approach, Bonvin puts forward some criticisms to the simplistic view on responsibility of most activation programmes that merely aim at a quick reinsertion of people in the labour market. He argues that responsibility should entail having access to or offering adequate resources and opportunities to act as well as having effective freedom to choose one's life path. These are important ingredients for future employment policies.

A number of chapters are devoted to revealing that the EU is far from being the only actor of charge in coordinating European labour markets. National governments, employers and workers also contribute to the labour market and jointly shape its character. Zimmerman's chapter for instance deals with corporate social responsibility. And even though its conclusion is that corporate social responsibility is still in its early stage, important initiatives spring from employers. What needs to be done – and this is a conclusion that may be drawn from nearly every chapter – is to investigate approaches to safeguard fundamental rights or set minimum standards to secure some level of social security and to prevent unwanted deviating behaviour. However, not only legislation should contribute to future employment policies, but also debates should become less dominated by economic and financial perspectives. Inspiration for such more balanced debates may be found in the past, as shown for instance by Whiteside and by Salais. The original vision of the founding fathers of the EU included an economic as well as a social union, and earlier public interventions in urban economies combined both economic and social action.

Although *Transforming European Employment Policy* hosts a range of interesting chapters that somehow contribute to the aim of the book, expanding some of the main concepts therein might have been particularly useful to the reader, especially with regard to certain

contributions. Moreover, a concluding section at the end of the book could have added value as providing a more concise idea of the ‘integrated approach to employment’ the book wants to develop, and incorporating a research and policy agenda. Perhaps the editors found it too early to give such a definite overview. Rather, they actively call upon us, researchers and actors in the civil, economic and social spheres, to “[...] take responsibility for opening up new paths and publicising them so that fellow citizens can appropriate them”(p. 16). Hopefully, many readers will be motivated by *Transforming European Employment Policy* and start actively contributing to an overall framework for social and economic prosperity throughout the EU.

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